

February 8, 2010

School's Out



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● The next issue of
 ● Capitol Journal will be
 ● available on February 22nd.
 ●

Top Story

Teacher furloughs have cut HAWAII's school year by 10 percent, giving it the fewest education days in the nation. With public discord growing, the governor, lawmakers and education officials are at an impasse over how to get kids back into school.

SNCJ Spotlight

Hawaii struggling to find end to school furloughs

It has been three months since HAWAII Gov. Linda Lingle (R) imposed school "Furlough Fridays," making the Aloha State the only one to actually close public schools on what would otherwise be regular instruction days. But in spite of growing public pressure to find a resolution that would return kids and teachers to the classroom, no immediate end appears in sight.

Lingle is at odds with state education officials over her proposal to use \$50 million in special state funds to reduce the furlough days, which have shrunk the Aloha State school year by 10 percent, leaving it with just 163 instruction



days, the fewest in the nation. Lingle imposed the furloughs last year to help balance the state budget. Under her proposal, the state would take money from the state's Rainy Day Fund to pay for re-opening schools for all but three of the remaining furlough days this semester and next school year.

That proposal is not new. In fact, Lingle offered it up last November, just a month after she ordered the furloughs. But so far, state education officials have refused to take it to the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA), which needs to endorse the plan because it entails converting 12 current planning days into instructional days. State Board of Education (BOE), Department of Education (DOE) and HSTA officials have instead continued to insist the governor accept their own plan, which would use about two-thirds of the Rainy Day Fund cash but only restore seven furlough days this semester and none next school year. Lingle has refused to accept those terms.

At the heart of the dispute is a difference of opinion over how much it costs daily to run the state's school system. The HSTA places the figure at about \$5.5 million, while Lingle wants schools to operate on what are now Furlough Fridays with a scaled-down schedule that costs around \$3.3 million.

The governor also refutes BOE Chairman Garrett Toguchi's claim that they already have an agreement in place, noting that "there can be no formal agreement without the Governor's vote." The situation got worse last week when Toguchi laid the blame for the impasse on Lingle, saying "if she (the governor) wanted to, she could take her proposal to the HSTA herself." Lingle's office immediately refuted the claim, spokesperson Russell Pang citing a state collective bargaining law that bars the governor from presenting such a proposal to the union on her own. It is the same law, Pang said, that prevents the three entities from reaching any formal agreement without the governor's endorsement.

Lawmakers jumped into the fray last week as well, with a trio of Senate committees approving a pair of bills that would raid the state Hurricane Relief Fund of \$111 million to restore all 30 remaining Furlough Fridays through next school year. The first bill, SB 2124, would provide \$36 million from the Hurricane Relief Fund for the furlough days remaining in the school year through June, while SB 2436 would access \$75 million from the fund for 24 furlough days through June 2011. Both bills were forwarded to the Senate Ways and Means Committee for review. Legislative Republicans have also indicated they will propose legislation requiring

In the hopper

At any given time, State Net tracks tens of thousands of bills in all 50 states, the US Congress and the District of Columbia. Here's a snapshot of what's in the legislative works:

Number of Prefiles last week: 942

Number of Intros last week: 8,291

Number of Enacted/Adopted last week: 537

Number of 2010 Session Prefiles to date: 13,087

Number of 2010 Intros to date: 39,521

Number of 2010 Session Enacted/Adopted overall to date: 2,268

Number of 2009-10 bills currently in State Net Database: 147,277

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(measures current as of 2/4/2010)
Source: State Net database

the state to offer 180 days of public school instruction.

Furlough Fridays have been controversial since their inception. In an op-ed piece right after the furloughs took effect in October, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan wrote “It’s inconceivable to me that this is the best solution for HAWAII,” adding that the state was taking “a step in the wrong direction.”

That sentiment was recently echoed by the U.S. military, which claims the furloughs have amped up concern among military families who already have serious reservations about a public education system where, in 2009, almost two-thirds of the public schools failed to meet federal education achievement requirements.

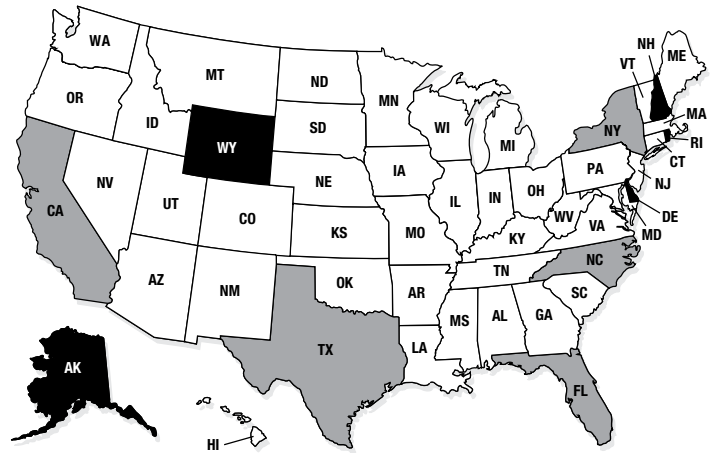
Lt. Col. Daniel King, Deputy Director of Public Affairs for the U.S. Pacific Command, said the services have been hearing rumors for years about military personnel refusing HAWAII assignments because of the public education system.

“There is a lot of anecdotal stuff out there, a lot of rumors not backed up by hard data,” King says, adding that the availability of a good education is a serious quality of life issue for all military families, one that often deeply impacts the service’s retention rate.

“This is clearly an emotionally charged issue,” King says.

So emotional in fact that the military brass recently commissioned researchers from Johns Hopkins University to study the attitude of military personnel toward HAWAII public education over a three-year period in an effort to see whether there is any concrete data to support the anecdotes. The study, which will track families both currently assigned to the Isles and those who have left, will hopefully determine whether soldiers, sailors and airmen actually believe the education their children received in HAWAII was substandard or prepared them well for their next school. It will also help to determine whether military families are simply opting to keep

Bird’s eye view



Source: Washington Post, Recovery.gov

Legend: Most jobs funded by federal stimulus (gray square), Least jobs funded by stimulus (black square)

Stimulus saving jobs

The federal economic stimulus program created nearly 600,000 jobs nationwide in the final quarter of 2009, according to data released by the Obama administration last month. That total is down significantly from the 640,000 figure reported for the previous quarter, in part because the administration only counted jobs paid for with stimulus dollars instead of estimating the number of jobs “created or saved,” which had drawn criticism. CALIFORNIA once again reported the highest number of stimulus jobs (71,015) and WYOMING again reported the lowest (851).





their kids out of the public school system, either by home-schooling them, placing them in private schools or leaving them with family in other states. Military statistics show that only about 14,000 school-aged dependents are currently enrolled in Aloha State schools, almost 10,000 less than the military says should be there based on the number of service personnel in the state.

When it comes to the Furlough Fridays, soldiers like Master Sgt. Tamatha R. Perkins, whose 6-year-old son, John, is a first-grader on Oahu, are already making their feelings known. “Hawaii doesn’t have the strongest education system as it is,” she said. “So then to compromise by taking more hours away? If they’re in the bottom tier, they don’t need to be cutting out days of education. They’re going the wrong way.”

King says each of the service branches — army, navy, air force and marines — has created programs to help offset some of the negative impact of the furloughs. He says

those programs, which range from supplemental education programming for kids left out in the cold by the school closures to day care for families where both parents work to, will continue as long as they are needed.

Meanwhile, Linda Smith, Lingle’s senior policy advisor, urged education officials last week “to stop stonewalling and to move forward” on the

governor’s proposal to use the Rainy Day Fund.

The courts are preparing to get into the act as well. This week, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals will travel to Honolulu to hear arguments in two pending federal lawsuits challenging the furloughs, and one on behalf of nine disabled children with autism, and the other a class-action lawsuit on behalf of regular- and special-education students. The court has twice refused to issue injunctions halting the furloughs.

The ongoing impasse has led a trio of former governors to call for a major education overhaul. Former Govs. George Ariyoshi, John Waihee and Ben Cayetano, all Democrats, last month issued a reform plan that would abolish the current BOE, which is elected by voters, with one appointed by the governor. Their plan would also make principals more accountable by giving them authority over as much as 90 percent of their budgets and allowing them to create programming that fits their individual schools’ needs. It would also mandate more instructional time.

Lingle has also called for major changes to the BOE, though her proposal is to amend the state’s Constitution to abolish the agency altogether and make the superintendent of schools a Cabinet-level position appointed by the governor.

Last Wednesday, the House Committee on Education weighed in on that argument by endorsing a pair of bills that favor the former governors’ proposal. The measures,

Upcoming stories

Here are some of the topics you will see covered in upcoming issues of the State Net Capitol Journal:

- **State food stamp struggles**
- **Budget updates**
- **Health care reform**

“If they’re in the bottom tier, they don’t need to be cutting out days of education. They’re going the wrong way.”





HB 2376 and HB 2377, would ask voters to decide in November whether the state constitution should be amended to allow the governor to appoint a nine-member BOE from a pool of candidates selected by an advisory council. Those appointments would need to be approved by the state Senate. Lawmakers ignored a request by Smith to adopt the governor’s plan to do away with the BOE entirely. Rep. Roy Takumi (D), who chairs the Committee, said the House currently has no plans to consider Lingle’s request. (HONOLULU STAR BULLETIN, HONOLULU ADVERTISER, NEW YORK TIMES, WALL STREET JOURNAL, STATE NET INTERVIEWS)

– *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Budget & taxes

O BAMA BUDGET INCLUDES MEDICAID FUNDING FOR STATES: The federal budget proposed by President Obama last week includes a six-month extension of the Medicaid funding increase for states that was part of the federal stimulus package and was set to expire at the end of the year. Democrats had initially hoped to include the extension in the federal health care overhaul, but they’re evidently not waiting around for the stalled health bill to begin moving again.

Some state governors had been counting on more Medicaid money, until the Republican victory in MASSACHUSETTS’ U.S. Senate race last month put the health plan in jeopardy.

WASHINGTON Gov. Christine Gregoire (D) thought her state was getting an additional \$450 million in Medicaid funding after the U.S. House passed its health reform bill in November. Before the White House proposed the funding extension in the budget, the Evergreen State was considering a sales tax on candy and chewing gum as well as a tax on carbonated beverages.

Even CALIFORNIA Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R), who opposes the health reform bill, calling it a “trough of bribes, deals and loopholes” in his State of the State address, included a \$1.2 billion increase in federal funding for the Golden State’s version of Medicaid, Medi-Cal, in the budget he proposed for the 2010-11 fiscal year.

They may actually get the money now. There doesn’t appear to be any significant opposition to the Medicaid extension in Congress currently. One reason may be that the recession is sending more Americans into the program. According to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Medicaid enrollment grew by an average of 5.4 percent in fiscal 2009, the highest rate in six years. And that rate may climb to 6.6 percent in fiscal 2010.

“We think some of those people who are now coming on Medicaid are a segment of the population who have never been on Medicaid,” Gov. Gregoire said last week. (WALL STREET JOURNAL, STATELINE.ORG)

GOVERNMENT RUNNING ‘HOUSE’ IN

KS: Back in the 1880s, KANSAS was home to the “wickedest little city in America”: Dodge. For much of the time since, the state has been trying to live that reputation down. Prohibition remained in effect in the state until 1948, 15 years after the repeal of the federal ban. Liquor stores were forbidden from selling cold beer until 1970 — to discourage customers from guzzling it on the spot — and bars and restaurants have only been allowed to serve alcohol to the public since 1986.

But a little wickedness has returned to Dodge City, thanks in no small part to the state. Late last year, the Boot Hill Casino & Resort opened in Dodge. It boasts over 580 slot machines and table games, including poker and blackjack. And it’s owned by the state, an arrangement that doesn’t exist anywhere else in the country.

The new casino, built and operated by KANSAS-based Butler National Corp., is expected to gross \$40 million a year. The state will receive 27 percent of that, an amount that isn’t out of line with gambling taxes in other states, which range from less than 7 percent in NEVADA to over 50 percent in PENNSYLVANIA, according to the American Gaming Association.

What is unusual about KANSAS’ casino, however, is the level of control the state exercises over its operations. When it first opened, for instance, state officials ordered larger payouts on slot machines they deemed too miserly. If they hadn’t done so, “no one was going to play,” said Ed Van Patten, executive director of the KANSAS state lottery. In addition to deciding how loose the slots will be, Van Patten’s staff also reviews all of the casino’s gaming software and even approves names for slot machines, which have included “Blazing 777” and “Mr. Cashman.”

Although gambling took a big hit from the recession, KANSAS lawmakers, like those elsewhere, saw gambling as one of the few new revenue sources available to them. But the KANSAS constitution only permitted a state lottery and nonprofit-owned horse and dog racetracks, not commercial casinos. So state lawmakers passed a bill in 2007 expanding the state lottery’s purview from scratch-off tickets to full-scale casinos. Boot Hill is the first of four casinos that will be built and operated in the state by a private company and wholly owned by the lottery.

The week in session

States in Regular Session: AK, AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, MA, MD, ME, MO, MS, MN, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, PR, RI, SC, TN, US, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV, WY

States in Recess: DE(JFC Budget Hearings), WI

States in Special Session: AZ “a”, CA “f”, CA “h”, OR “a”

Special Sessions in Recess: WI “b”

States in Budget Hearings: DE

States Currently Prefiling or Drafting for 2010: FL, LA, MT, ND

State Special Sessions Adjourned in 2010: CA “e”, TN “a”

Letters indicate special/extraordinary sessions

— Compiled By JAMES ROSS
(session information current as of 2/5/2010)
Source: State Net database



“It’s different,” said Boot Hill’s general manager, Mike Tamburelli, who’s opened gambling resorts in LOUISIANA, MISSISSIPPI and MISSOURI. “But it’s working out well. They’re interested in making as much money as they can, which is good. That’s what we’re interested in, too.” (WALL STREET JOURNAL)

IT PROJECTS POSE CHALLENGES FOR STATES: Upgrading outdated information technology systems is a risky proposition for government entities. It is estimated that 85 percent of all government IT projects fail at some point in the process.

“The IT project road is littered with failure, cost-overrun, mission creep, bad contractors, systems that don’t deliver, failed relationships between the parties,” said Dianne Lancaster, OREGON’s chief purchasing officer and president of the National Association of State Purchasing Officers (NASPO).

Some of the failures littering the IT project road include TEXAS’ \$863 million government-wide data consolidation project with IBM that was suspended in late 2008 because of security lapses and backup failures; VIRGINIA’s five-year, \$2.4-billion IT contract with Northrup Grumman to create a new multi-agency IT infrastructure, which has suffered repeated network interruptions and is now a year behind; and CALIFORNIA’s effort to link the state’s courts, which has ballooned in cost from \$240 million to over \$1 billion.

But most state officials and vendors agree there are steps states can take to minimize their risk of failure. The first is involving all vested agency officials in the process, from the planning stage through project completion and testing. The second is ensuring that vendors and state managers fully understand the project’s parameters and scope before the bidding process starts. The third is conducting a two-stage bidding process, requiring finalists to provide a prototype before the winner is selected. The fourth is forming a strong relationship with the vendor that balances accountability and flexibility. And the last is building a strong state management team to oversee the project through its implementation. (STATELINE.ORG)

FL FACING NASA JOB CUTS: President Obama has proposed some big changes for NASA in his 2011 budget. Among other things, he wants to jettison plans launched by George W. Bush in 2004 to return to the moon and retire the space shuttle program, allowing private companies to handle human transport into lower orbit.

The proposed change of course wasn’t the best news for FLORIDA, which stands to lose 7,000 jobs if the plan is approved by Congress. Gov. Charlie Crist (R) chose to focus on the silver lining: the 1,700 private-sector jobs the plan could create.

“I will work aggressively to ensure FLORIDA is prepared to capitalize on these possibilities,” he said.

Other FLORIDA lawmakers saw only the cloud.



“This budget effectively ends America’s leadership in human space exploration,” said Rep. Bill Posey (R). “While the administration has thrown hundreds of billions of dollars into a failed stimulus bill, it has failed to give NASA the vision and mission to help America lead the world in space.” (MIAMI HERALD)

STATES’ ‘ANTI-STIMULUS’ DRAG ON US EMPLOYMENT: In an interview for PBS’ “NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” late last month, U.C. Berkeley professor and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich said the only thing that will really create more jobs is “a larger stimulus.” The reason, he said, was that states are currently “running what might be called an anti-stimulus package in the range of \$350 billion this year and the next,” by which he meant the tax hikes, service cuts and job cuts states must make to meet their constitutional requirements to balance their budgets.

Reich has actually been tossing around the “anti-stimulus” idea for a while. The \$350 billion figure he cites evidently came from a projection made by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities’ back in November. And in December he told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that the Obama administration should use the remaining money in the Troubled Asset Relief Program to aid state and local governments and extend unemployment insurance.

“Consumers are not going to be able to spend enough to get people back in jobs,” he said. “Exports are not going to be nearly enough to stimulate job growth. Businesses are not going to be able to invest nearly enough. That only leaves government as the spender of last resort.” (PBS NEWS HOUR, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, BLOOMBERG.COM)

BUDGETS IN BRIEF: Despite plummeting income and sales tax collections, state and local governments managed to maintain level spending in 2009, thanks to federal economic stimulus money. Although some programs were cut, overall spending inched up 0.1 percent to \$2.2 trillion, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (USA TODAY). • The **MISSISSIPPI** Supreme Court has ruled that Gov. Haley Barbour (R) can’t cut funding to the state’s courts as he proposed last month because doing so would violate the Constitution’s separation of powers doctrine. The cuts were part of a new round of budget cuts Barbour ordered Jan. 22 for all state agencies (COMMERCIAL APPEAL [MEMPHIS]). • Gaming interests spent

Upcoming elections

2/4/2010 - 2/25/2010

02/06/2010

Louisiana Special Primary
Senate District 5

02/09/2010

New York Special Election
Assembly Districts 3, 15, 24 and 89

02/16/2010

Alabama Special Runoff
House District 40

Mississippi Special Election
Senate District 36

New Hampshire Special Election
Senate District 16

02/23/2010

Florida Special Election
House District 58

Georgia Special Election
House District 19



2011, and imposing the full \$100 fine for violations after that date. Rell said she also will ask lawmakers to pass a bill barring drivers from receiving or sending cell phone text messages and impose a \$500 fine on drivers who cause an accident while violating one of the laws' provisions. (HARTFORD COURANT)

In case you missed it

The earthquake in Haiti has caused misery and destruction of epic proportions. With the lessons of Hurricane Katrina still fresh, states are busily preparing to deal with the next major disaster here at home.

In case you missed it, the article can be found on our Web site at

http://www.statenet.com/capitol_journal/02-01-2010/html

PATERSON VETOES ETHICS REFORM

BILL: NEW YORK Gov. David Paterson (D) vetoed AB 9544, a bill meant to combat political corruption and require elected officials to disclose more about their outside financial interests. Paterson said the proposals, which would have required lawmakers to create new ethics panels to monitor themselves and to enforce new financial disclosure requirements, were not enough to change Albany's climate of corruption.

"The only way to bring fairness and openness to government is to fundamentally reform the way Albany operates," Mr. Paterson said. "We must bring fundamental change to the culture of Planet Albany, and finally put the interests of the people of NEW YORK ahead of lobbyists and special interests."

Senate Democratic Conference leader John Sampson said he would schedule an override vote as soon as possible, but prospects for success looked bleak. Dems hold only a slim 32-20 majority in that chamber, meaning they would need to gather at least 10 Republicans to gain the 42 votes needed for the override. Sampson said that unlikely possibility would not deter him from pushing forward.

"It's going to the floor," he said. "You can do what's political, or you can do what's right."

The override effort is expected to have an easier time in the Assembly, which approved the bill 59-1 last month. (NEW YORK TIMES)

EXECUTIVE ORDERS: MASSACHUSETTS Gov. Deval Patrick (D) issued EO 520, which allows state employees to donate vacation and personal time to co-workers who have relatives in Haiti and need time to care for family members or travel to the country (MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR'S OFFICE).

GOVERNORS IN BRIEF: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) appointed Brigadier General Mary J. Knight as the new leader of the **CALIFORNIA** National Guard. Knight becomes the first woman ever to lead the state Guard, and the first African American woman to command any state Guard unit (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • Still in **CALIFORNIA**, a court ruled that the Schwarzenegger administration acted legally when it enforced a new law last year that eliminated two paid state holidays (SACRAMENTO BEE). • **WEST VIRGINIA** Gov. Joe Manchin (D) said governors should stop relying on federal stimulus dollars to balance their budgets, suggesting



the federal government should instead allow states to borrow money at zero percent interest for three years. Manchin said states are becoming too dependent on Washington D.C. to pump money into their coffers rather than putting together a course of action to steer themselves through the economic downturn (CHARLESTON DAILY MAIL).

• **VIRGINIA** Gov. Robert McDonnell (R) has yet to issue an executive order barring discrimination in the state workforce, breaking a 36-year practice by governors of both parties of making a formal statement on the issue one of their first acts in office. Federal law already bars such discrimination, but all five of the previous governors — George Allen and James S. Gilmore III and Democrats Mills E. Godwin Jr., Mark Warner and Tim Kaine — have all issued a statement prohibiting discrimination on those grounds as their first or second executive order (WASHINGTON POST).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Hot issues

B **USINESS:** The **WASHINGTON** Senate endorses SB 6248, which would ban Bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical used to harden plastic in numerous consumer products, in the manufacture, sale and distribution of containers used to hold food or beverages for children under 3 years of age. The measure is now in the House (SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER). • The **INDIANA** Senate approves SB 213, which would bar state and local governments from awarding contracts to companies unless the contractor is able to verify that all its employees are in the United States legally. The proposal moves to the House (INDIANAPOLIS STAR). • The **VIRGINIA** Senate approves SB 298, legislation that would bar home insurers from canceling policies or raising rates on homeowners because their properties were built with Chinese-made drywall found to contain toxic material. It is now in the House (VIRGINIAN-PILOT [NORFOLK]).

CRIME & PUNISHMENT: The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rules that **DELAWARE**'s lethal injection protocol is constitutional. The protocol — which has never actually been used — had been challenged by death row inmates who claimed it carried the risk of causing excessive pain and would thus violate the 8th Amendment (DELMARVA DAILY TIMES). • The **CALIFORNIA** Supreme Court upholds a Golden State law that bars registered sex offenders from living near schools and parks even if their sex crimes were committed years before the restrictions became law. Four parolees had challenged the statute, saying the state was applying the law retroactively (LOS ANGELES TIMES). • The **MISSISSIPPI** Senate approves HB 512, a bill that would make the Magnolia State the second in the nation to require a prescription to

buy products such as Sudafed that contain pseudoephedrine, the key ingredient found in the illegal drug methamphetamine. OREGON is the other state with a similar law. The bill goes to Gov. Haley Barbour (R), who says he will sign it into law (MEMPHIS COMMERCIAL APPEAL). • The **INDIANA** Senate approves SB 285, a bill that would bar retailers from selling an individual more than 3.6 grams of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine in one day, or nine in a 30-day period. The bill would also force retailers to electronically transmit information concerning the sale of the drugs to a statewide tracking system. The bill is now in the House (FORT WAYNE GAZETTE).

EDUCATION: The **INDIANA** Senate approves SB 150, which would require that Hoosier State public schools not begin until after Labor Day and end no sooner than June 10. The measure now is in the House (INDIANAPOLIS STAR).

HEALTH & SCIENCE: The **VIRGINIA** Senate approves a trio of identical bills — SB 283, SB 311 and SB 417 — that would make it illegal to require individuals to purchase health insurance. The measures are in the House, where they are also expected to gain approval (WASHINGTON POST). • The **ILLINOIS** Supreme Court strikes down the Prairie State law that places caps on medical malpractice awards, saying it violates separation of powers by allowing lawmakers to interfere with a judge’s ability to reduce verdicts. The law established caps on noneconomic damages of \$500,000 in cases against doctors and \$1 million against hospitals (CHICAGO TRIBUNE).

POTPOURRI: The **MISSISSIPPI** House endorses HB 113, a bill that would require Magnolia State government agencies to use the lowest-paid qualified employee to search for records requested by citizens. The measure is intended to prevent agencies from using high-priced attorneys or other high-salaried employees to fill public records requests, thus driving up the cost of providing that information. The bill moves to the Senate (BILOXI SUN-HERALD). • The **INDIANA** House endorses HB 1279, a bill that would ban drivers from sending or receiving text messages while behind the wheel. It is now with the Senate (INDIANAPOLIS STAR). • Still in **INDIANA**, the Senate approves SB 195, which would require that information on gun permit holders and applicants be kept private. It shoots over to the House (INDIANAPOLIS STAR). • The **ALABAMA** House approves HB 159, legislation that would keep audio recordings of 911 calls from being released without a court order finding that the public’s interest in the recording is greater than the privacy interest of those involved in the call. It is now in the Senate (BIRMINGHAM NEWS). • The **ALASKA** Board of Game adopts new rules that allow residents to own hybrids of wild cats, provided the animals’ gene pools are watered down. The Board rejected calls to legalize monkeys, sloths and other exotic pets (ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS).

— *Compiled by RICH EHISEN*

Once around the statehouse lightly

THE HELL YOU SAY: Sailors, truck drivers and all other alleged cursers extraordinaire should take note: CALIFORNIA wants you to clean up your act. As the *Sacramento Bee* reports, a pair of Golden State lawmakers have teamed up to introduce ACR 112, which would declare the first week of March as “Cuss Free Week.” The resolution would ask residents to abstain from using foul language for those seven days in order “to set a tone of harmony and connectedness in our communities, and to inspire ourselves to higher endeavors.” The proposal doesn’t mention if lawmakers would try to help their own cause by abstaining from budget negotiations during that week.

ALL A’TWITTER ALL THE TIME: One has to wonder if anyone has ever told OHIO Sen. Shannon Jones it is okay to have an unexpressed thought. As the *Columbus Dispatch* reports, Jones recently spent the duration of Gov. Ted Strickland’s State of the State address posting snarky comments via the social networking site Twitter, blasting pretty much everything the governor had to say. Jones sent more than a dozen “tweets” during the gov’s speech, much to the chagrin of House Speaker Armond Budish, who notes that House rules forbid lawmakers from using electronic devices while on the House floor. (The speech was held in the House chambers). Jones defended her actions, calling herself someone with “very strident viewpoints” who is always “looking for opportunities to express that.” When asked if Jones’ behavior bothered Strickland, spokeswoman Amanda Wurst gave a tweet-worthy response: “OMG! He LOL.” Translation: Oh my God, he laughed out loud.

THE FAVRE FACTOR...AGAIN: Within moments of his MINNESOTA Vikings team getting bounced from the NFL playoffs, speculation began over whether notoriously fickle quarterback Brett Favre will finally, actually for-real-this-time retire. While Favre hasn’t said what he will do, the team is sure hoping he sticks around for at least one more year. As the Associated Press reports, Favre’s stellar regular season helped the team score big both on the field and on the bottom line, including record sales at Minneapolis stores carrying Vikings paraphernalia. All of which should, in theory, make it easier for the team to sway Gopher State lawmakers into funding a new stadium for Brett and the boys. A team spokesman said last week they are encouraging their fans to “weigh in” with their lawmakers soon. For their sake, said pols won’t focus on that horrible interception Favre threw to cost the team a chance at the Super Bowl.



SPEAKING OF FAVRE, the former Green Bay Packers QB isn't the only WISCONSIN icon with a reputation for waffling these days. Former Gov. Tommy Thompson, who served four terms in the gov's office, is mulling a run at his old job. Or maybe he isn't. As the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* reports, Thompson has flirted with the idea of running again off and on for the last several years, but won't commit either way. That has led to some growing tension among the GOP faithful, who want him to either get in the game or let everyone know he is out. As Dave Westlake, who is running in the Senate Republican primary, puts it, "Tommy Thompson always gets the ink and the attention. It's like Brett Favre. People are sick of it here." As of last week, Thompson had no comment on his future plans.

— By *RICH EHISEN*

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Graphic Design: Vanessa Perez
 ©2008 State Net ISSN: 1521-8449



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